

AMENDMENT

Amendments to the Claims: Please replace all prior versions and listings of claims with the following listing of claims.

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-84. (Cancelled)

85. (Currently Amended) A method for detecting postage fraud using an indexed lookup procedure, comprising:

receiving, at a postage-issuing computer system, a request for a postage transaction from an end user computer;

allocating a unique tracking number to the requested postage transaction, wherein the unique tracking number allocated to the postage transaction provides a mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service (USPS);

generating, at the postage-issuing computer system, a unique postage indicium for the requested postage transaction, wherein the unique postage indicium contains the unique tracking number allocated to the postage transaction that provides the mail piece tracking capability within the USPS;

storing information for the postage transaction in a postage database coupled to the postage-issuing computer system, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction includes the unique tracking number and the unique postage indicium;

indexing the information stored for the postage transaction in the postage database with the unique tracking number allocated to the postage transaction;

retrieving the information indexed with the unique tracking number from the postage database in response to receiving a validation request from the USPS, wherein the validation request received from the USPS relates to a mail piece carrying a printed postage indicium that contains the unique tracking number; ~~and~~

comparing the information retrieved from the postage database to one or more records in a transaction database that stores one or more tracking numbers contained in one or more postage indicia carried on mail pieces previously handled by the USPS; and

transmitting, from the postage-issuing computer system to the USPS, data indicating whether the unique tracking number contained in the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece matches any of ~~information retrieved from the database to records in the USPS transaction database,~~ wherein the USPS ~~determines whether to submit~~ submits the mail piece ~~carrying the unique tracking number~~ for normal delivery ~~if based on the data information~~ transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system indicates that the unique tracking number contained in the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece does not match any of the records in the transaction database.

86. **(Cancelled)**

87. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 85, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction further includes one or more of a postage amount, a date, a time, a service class, an optional data advance, a meter number, an account number, or a destination zip code.

88-89. **(Cancelled)**

90. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 85, further comprising:

applying a private key to the unique postage indicium to derive a digital signature from the unique postage indicium, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction in the postage database further includes the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium; and

transmitting, from the postage-issuing computer system, the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium to the USPS in response to the validation request, wherein the USPS verifies that the postage-issuing computer system generated ~~[[a]]~~ the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece ~~if in response to determining that~~

transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system is consistent with a digital signature derived from the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

91-92. (Cancelled)

93. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 85, wherein allocating the unique tracking number to the requested postage transaction includes:

requesting the unique tracking number from the USPS, wherein the postage-issuing computer system requests the unique tracking number from the USPS; and

receiving the unique tracking number from the USPS at the postage-issuing computer system prior to allocating the unique tracking number to the postage transaction.

94-96. (Cancelled)

97. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 85, wherein the unique tracking number comprises a delivery confirmation code.

98. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 85, wherein the postage-issuing computer system receives the validation request from the USPS over a communications link connecting the postage-issuing computer system with a computer system at the USPS.

99. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 98, wherein the postage-issuing computer system transmits the data indicating whether the unique tracking number contained in the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece matches any of ~~information retrieved from the records in the transaction database~~ to the USPS over the communications link.

100. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 99, further comprising transmitting the unique tracking number and the unique postage indicium to the end user computer in a format that enables the end user computer to print a one-dimensional bar code representative of the unique tracking number and a two-dimensional bar code representative of the unique postage indicium.

101. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 100, wherein the computer system at the USPS displays the data information transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system.

102. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 101, wherein the USPS verifies that the mail piece was sent from a trusted entity ~~if in response to the data information~~ transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system includes ~~including~~ one or more of a meter number or an account number.

103. **(Cancelled)**

104. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 102, wherein the postage-issuing computer system transmits the unique tracking number and the unique postage indicium to the end user computer over another communications link connecting the postage-issuing computer system with the end user computer.

105-123. **(Cancelled)**

124. **(Currently Amended)** A system for detecting postage fraud using an indexed lookup procedure, comprising:

a postage database coupled to a postage-issuing computer system, wherein the postage database stores one or more records describing unique postage indicia generated by the postage-issuing computer system;

a transaction database coupled to the postage-issuing computer system, wherein the transaction database stores one or more records describing one or more tracking numbers contained in one or more postage indicia carried on mail pieces previously handled by the United States Postal Service (USPS);

a communications link that connects the postage-issuing computer system with an end user computer, and that further connects the postage-issuing computer system with a computer system at the ~~United States Postal Service (USPS)~~ USPS; and

one or more software modules ~~data processing circuitry~~ that ~~executes~~ execute on the postage-issuing computer system, wherein executing the one or more software modules ~~data processing circuitry~~ on the postage-issuing computer system causes the postage-issuing computer system to:

receive a request for a postage transaction from the end user computer;

allocate a unique tracking number to the requested postage transaction, wherein the unique tracking number allocated to the ~~[[the]]~~ postage transaction provides a mail piece tracking capability within the USPS;

generate a unique postage indicium for the requested postage transaction, wherein the unique postage indicium contains the unique tracking number allocated to the postage transaction that provides the mail piece tracking capability within the USPS;

store information for the postage transaction in the postage database, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction includes the unique tracking number and the unique postage indicium;

index the information stored for the postage transaction in the postage database with the unique tracking number allocated to the postage transaction;

retrieve the information indexed with the unique tracking number from the postage database in response to receiving a validation request from the computer system at the USPS, wherein the validation request received from the USPS relates to a mail piece carrying a printed postage indicium that contains the unique tracking number; ~~and~~

compare the information retrieved from the postage database to the records in the transaction database that stores the tracking numbers contained in the postage indicia carried on the mail pieces previously handled by the USPS; and

transmit data indicating whether the unique tracking number contained in the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece matches any of information retrieved from the records in the transaction database to the USPS, wherein the USPS determines whether to submit submits the mail piece carrying the unique tracking number for normal delivery if based on the transmitted information data indicates that the unique tracking number contained in the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece does not match any of the records in the transaction database.

125. (Cancelled)

126. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 124, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction further includes one or more of a postage amount, a date, a time, a service class, an optional data advance, a meter number, an account number, or a destination zip code.

127. (Cancelled)

128. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 124, wherein executing the one or more software modules ~~data processing circuitry~~ on the postage-issuing computer system further causes the postage-issuing computer system to:

apply a private key to the unique postage indicium to derive a digital signature from the unique postage indicium, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction in the postage database further includes the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium; and

transmit the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium to the USPS in response to the validation request, wherein the USPS verifies that the postage-issuing computer system generated [[a]] the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece if in

~~response to determining that~~ the digital signature transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system is consistent with a digital signature derived from the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

129-130. **(Cancelled)**

131. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 124, wherein executing the one or more software modules ~~data processing circuitry~~ on the postage-issuing computer system further causes the postage-issuing computer system to:

request the unique tracking number from the computer system at the USPS; and

receive the unique tracking number from the computer system at the USPS prior to allocating the unique tracking number to the postage transaction.

132-137. **(Cancelled)**

138. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 124, wherein the USPS verifies that the mail piece was sent from a trusted entity ~~if in response to determining that the~~ data information transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system includes one or more of a meter number or an account number.

139. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 124, wherein the unique tracking number comprises a delivery confirmation code.

140. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 124, wherein executing the one or more software modules ~~data processing circuitry~~ on the postage-issuing computer system further causes the postage-issuing computer system to:

compare the unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking number in the postage database to ~~[[a]]~~ the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece, wherein the validation request received from the USPS identifies the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

141-142. **(Cancelled)**

143. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim ~~[[124]]~~ 128, wherein the postage-issuing computer system applies the private key to the unique tracking number contained in the unique postage indicium to derive the digital signature from the unique postage indicium.

144. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 97, further comprising:

applying a private key to the delivery confirmation code to derive a digital signature from the unique postage indicium, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction in the postage database further includes the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium; and

transmitting, from the postage-issuing computer system, the digital signature derived from the unique postage indicium to the USPS in response to the validation request, wherein the USPS verifies that the postage-issuing computer system generated ~~[[a]]~~ the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece ~~if in response to determining that~~ the digital signature transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system is consistent with a digital signature derived from the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

145. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 85, further comprising:

comparing the unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking number in the postage database to ~~[[a]]~~ the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece, wherein the validation request received from the USPS identifies the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

146. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 145, further comprising:

transmitting, from the postage-issuing computer system to the USPS, a response to the validation request received from the USPS, wherein the response to the validation request indicates whether the unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking number in the postage database matches the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece, wherein the USPS submits the mail piece for the normal delivery if the ~~[[in]]~~ response to the validation request indicates that the unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking number in the postage database matches ~~matching~~ the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

147. **(Currently Amended)** A method for detecting postage fraud using an indexed lookup procedure, comprising:

generating, at a postage-issuing computer system, a unique postage indicium in response to receiving a request for a postage transaction from an end user computer, wherein the unique postage indicium contains a unique delivery confirmation code allocated to the postage transaction, and wherein the unique delivery confirmation code ~~that~~ provides a mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service (USPS);

storing information for the postage transaction in a postage database coupled to the postage-issuing computer system, wherein the information stored for the postage transaction includes the unique delivery confirmation code and the unique postage indicium;

indexing the information stored for the postage transaction in the postage database with the unique delivery confirmation code allocated to the postage transaction;

retrieving the information indexed with the unique delivery confirmation code from the postage database in response to receiving a validation request from the USPS, wherein the

validation request received from the USPS relates to a mail piece carrying a printed postage indicium that contains the unique delivery confirmation code; ~~and~~

comparing the information retrieved from the postage database to one or more records in a transaction database that stores one or more delivery confirmation codes contained in one or more postage indicia carried on mail pieces previously handled by the USPS; and

transmitting, from the postage-issuing computer system to the USPS, data indicating whether the unique delivery confirmation code contained in the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece matches any of information retrieved from the database to records in the USPS transaction database, wherein the USPS ~~determines whether to submit~~ submits the mail piece ~~carrying the unique delivery confirmation code for normal delivery if based on the data information~~ transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system indicates that the unique delivery confirmation code contained in the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece does not match any of the records in the transaction database.

148. **(New)** The method of claim 146, wherein the USPS does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the response to the validation request indicates that the unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking number in the postage database does not match the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

149. **(New)** The method of claim 85, wherein the USPS does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the data transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system indicates that the unique tracking number contained in the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece matches one or more of the records in the transaction database.

150. **(New)** The system of claim 140, wherein executing the one or more software modules on the postage-issuing computer system further causes the postage-issuing computer system to transmit a response to the validation request to the USPS, wherein the response to the validation request indicates whether the unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking number in the postage database matches the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece, wherein the USPS submits the mail piece for the normal delivery if the response to the validation request indicates that the unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking number in the postage database matches the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

151. **(New)** The system of claim 150, wherein the USPS does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the response to the validation request indicates that the unique postage indicium indexed with the unique tracking number in the postage database does not match the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece.

152. **(New)** The system of claim 124, wherein the USPS does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the data transmitted from the postage-issuing computer system indicates that the unique tracking number contained in the printed postage indicium carried on the mail piece matches one or more of the records in the transaction database.